



NEWS RELEASE

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THREE SITKA RESIDENTS PLEAD GUILTY TO ILLEGALLY SELLING SUBSISTENCE-CAUGHT HALIBUT

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Nelson P. Cohen announced today, July 24, 2008, that three Sitka residents, Jesse Rivera, age 43, Mario Rivera, age 41, and Artimeo Rivera, age 36, plead guilty in federal court to violations of the Lacey Act for illegally selling and shipping to Seattle, Washington, halibut caught under the Sitka Sound Subsistence Halibut program.

Jesse Rivera's plea agreement requires that he serve a sentence of six months imprisonment and pay a fine of \$40,000. Mario Rivera's plea agreement requires that he serve one month imprisonment, pay a fine in the amount of \$10,000 and forfeit to the United States a 20-foot Boston Whaler, along with the engines and other equipment. Artimeo Rivera's plea agreement requires that he serve one month in a half-way house and pay a \$5,000 fine. Each plea agreement requires that each defendant serve three years probation with a special condition which prohibits any commercial or subsistence fishing.

The guilty pleas came about as a result of an investigation conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Division of Law Enforcement and was based on evidence obtained from fisheries observers and interviews which provided legal grounds for the execution of search warrants on a Seattle seafood wholesaler in 2004. As a result of that search, NMFS investigators found checks and other records which established that during the summer of 2003, the Riveras shipped more than 10,000 pounds of subsistence-caught halibut to the seafood wholesaler in Seattle. In exchange for the halibut, the Riveras were paid more than \$50,000.

Mr. Cohen stated, "Our wild waters cover vast distances, making enforcement of the laws that preserve and protect our precious wild resources a daunting task. Most Alaskans respect and follow these important laws. To those who would break our laws: know there will be consequences."

"These actions are a total abuse of a carefully planned and managed subsistence fishery designed to assist Alaskans truly in need of subsistence halibut," according to NMFS Supervisory Special Agent Jeff Passer. "The public should know that we will not stand by and let a token few manipulate and abuse this system for financial gain. These plea agreements ensure that the defendants do not profit from their crimes, but are instead justly punished."

Mr. Cohen commended NMFS who conducted the investigation that led to the prosecution of the Riveras. Sentencing has been set for August 21, 2008, in Anchorage.

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